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THE

SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE

OF

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY.

VIEWED IN CONNECTION

WITH

MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY.

BY W. C. WALTON,

PASTOR OF THE SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

ALEXANDRIA, D. C.

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Southern District of New York, ss.

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THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY,

Viewed in Connection with Man's Responsibility.

INTRODUCTION.

IN entering upon the investigation of this subject, we are aware of the peculiar difficulties in which it is involved. Every minister must have felt these difficulties in a greater or less degree, at some stage of his experience ; and every one must find some way to dispose of them in order to proceed intelligently, and with satisfaction to himself, in the discharge of his official duties. Some, by fixing their attention too strongly and too exclusively upon the responsibility of man, have rejected the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty, so far as it relates to the conversion of sinners. Others have gone to the opposite extreme ; maintaining that man is not required to do any thing towards securing his own salvation ; that whole matter having been determined in the councils of eternity, which councils are to be carried into effect by divine agency, without the intervention of the creature. Again. Some, in opposition to the letter of both the Law and the Gospel, maintain that God requires of man duties *beyond* his strength.* The non-performance

* Mark xii. 30. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and *with all thy strength.*

of these duties they of course resolve into physical inability ; thus annihilating all human guilt, or maintaining that guilt consists in not doing what we are, physically, unable to perform ! Many have no definite views at all as to the amount of responsibility which rests upon the sinner ; and they would be greatly puzzled to answer the question—"How far is he to be urged to perform the duties which the Bible enjoins ?" They appear to have a vague conception of some kind of obligation resting upon the sinner ; but they are very much afraid of urging it too far, lest they should get upon Arminian ground, and say something derogatory to the *doctrines of grace*. And it must be confessed that some appear to be too much afraid of disturbing the consciences of sinners, and of making them unhappy by pressing them with duties to which they have so strong an aversion ! They are equally cautious of pressing the obligations of Christians. All must be done by the power of sovereign grace ; for which both saints and sinners must patiently wait until the Lord's good time shall come ! Saints must submissively wait for sovereign grace to make them more holy ; and sinners must, with the same regard to Divine Sovereignty, wait for converting grace ! *i. e.* they must submissively go on *in rebellion*, until sovereign grace shall enable them to submit !

Who can wonder if thinking men turn skeptical when they hear such things, and hear them identified with the Gospel of Christ ! The absurdities of the Roman Catholic system turned France into a nation of infidels ; and a similar cause will produce a similar effect wherever it

may exist. Protestant absurdities so far as they go, are as revolting to the understanding, as if they were associated with papal infallibility, transubstantiation, and other such like things.

We should think our time poorly employed in writing upon this subject, if the discussion were to be submitted only to those, who, without investigating the Bible for themselves, have adopted a system, chiefly because it is supported by certain authors whom they have been accustomed to regard as the standards of orthodoxy. Such persons do not love the truth for its own sake, nor for its Author's sake. They will not submit to the labour of thinking for themselves. The labour they have hitherto employed in religious investigations, has been chiefly to ascertain what their favourite authors believed, and by what arguments they supported their particular views. Having thus *studied theology*, as by a gross perversion of language it is called, they are unwilling to give a candid attention to any writer or speaker who proposes to unsettle their belief in the system they have adopted. What would be the consequence of thus disturbing their intellectual repose? To indolent minds, it would be frightful. A great part of their theological acquisitions would become useless, or worse than useless. They must unlearn much that they had learned; and they must now *begin* to think, and to study the Bible for themselves! It is pleasing, however, and encouraging, to reflect that but comparatively few are of this character. We rejoice to believe that there is an increasing number of ministers in all the evangelical denominations, who love the truth, and who love it so in-

tensely, that they are willing to search for it laboriously, and to search for it where alone it is to be found unadulterated,—in the Bible itself; who study the holy volume with deep humility, and yet with that mental independence which ought to characterize every man who feels that he has a soul of his own, and that he is accountable to God for the right use of its faculties. We feel confident that men and ministers of this description have greatly increased in the Presbyterian churches, and we hope the time is not far distant when all the churches of Christ will cease to be burdened and disgraced by members and ministers of the opposite character.

The writer trusts he has learned in some measure to be regulated by the views above expressed. Many a day's trial he has had in rectifying former errors, in disentangling his mind from the trammels of human authority, and in trying to ascertain what God says respecting the great truths which he has thought proper to reveal to man. He makes no high pretensions to theological attainments, but so far as he has made up his mind on those subjects which have engaged his attention, he feels that he is on terra firma. There is an inexpressible satisfaction in seeing things with our own eyes; and knowledge is more pleasant to the soul that loves the truth, than light is to the eyes. This pleasure is greatly increased by the labour of a personal investigation, and this pleasure he can truly say he has enjoyed while investigating the present subject.

The reader's attention is now called to the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty as it stands connected in the Bible, with the doctrine of man's responsibility.

PART I.

Of the Doctrine of Divine Sovereignty.

OUR object requires us to speak of this sovereignty only as it is exercised in the *salvation* of sinners. We need not attempt to explain how it is exercised in the *destruction* of sinners, until it is proved that sinners *are* destroyed by it. The Bible asserts that *sinners destroy themselves*. Hos. xiii, 9. Here some readers will be startled, seeing on the title page that the author is a Presbyterian. "What! do they not hold the doctrine of reprobation? and does not that doctrine imply that God exercises his sovereignty in creating multitudes of human beings in order to destroy them?" No, we answer: and again we answer, no! We never heard such a doctrine maintained by *any* class of men. Some have doubtless expressed themselves unguardedly and inaccurately on the subject, both in writing and in preaching. But it may be safely asserted that no considerable number of any denomination of Christians, at the present day, would maintain such a sentiment; and to impute it to those who disavow it, is something worse than a breach of charity.

We hold that in the punishment of sinners, Divine *justice*, or *equity*, is exercised; that they are punished, not because the sovereign will of God has so decreed, but because they *deserve* to be punished, and that the measure of their punishment

is graduated by the amount of their guilt. God *will render to every man according to his works*. This is *justice* or *equity*. Where then is sovereignty exercised? We answer, in the bestowment of unmerited favours. Thus we say with regard to those who have no claims upon His justice. God has a sovereign right to bestow his favours upon whom He pleases. Abstract principles, however, are best illustrated by examples. This principle may be illustrated by such examples as the following. God makes some creatures rational, others irrational. He makes some angels, others men. He bestows upon some, faculties of a higher order than are bestowed upon others of the same race. In these cases, however, there is no room for the exercise of mercy; since mercy supposes the existence of guilt. But these distinctions would have existed, if sin had never entered the universe.

Another illustration more to the point, is drawn from the distinction made between guilty creatures who deserve punishment. The fallen angels are dealt with on the principles of pure justice, while mercy is exercised to fallen man; not however at the *expense* of justice; the atonement satisfying its demands. Again: mercy is offered to all men on the only terms consistent with the glory of God and with the happiness of those concerned in such a dispensation. These terms are rejected by "all with one consent." Here then is an occasion for the exercise both of justice and of sovereignty. Of *justice*, in the punishment of all who continue incorrigible; and of *sovereignty*, in making some "willing" to accede to the terms on which mercy is proposed.

Now if it would have been right to punish the rebellious angels on the supposition that the Son of God had never interposed for the redemption of the human race, that interposition surely cannot make it wrong. They deserve condemnation and punishment on a ground entirely distinct from any consideration of the manner in which God will deal with another race of beings ; and their condition is made no worse by the mercy shown to men, except as they make it an occasion of increasing their guilt. And as *all* to whom the Gospel is offered, and who, if left to themselves would reject it, *deserve* punishment, those who *continue* to violate the law and to reject the Gospel, *continue* to deserve this punishment, while others are inclined—no matter by what influence—to obey the Gospel, and are saved. Nor is the condition of the former made worse by the mercy shown to the latter, except as they make it an occasion of increasing their guilt. They deserve condemnation on a ground entirely distinct from any consideration of what sovereign grace does for those who are saved. They deserve it because they have wickedly rebelled against God, and violated His holy, just, and good law ; and because in addition to this, they have rejected salvation freely offered to them, and which they might have secured by a cordial acceptance of it. This is the ground on which they are condemned ; this is the cause of their destruction, and not the sovereignty of God consigning them over to that destiny, because it was His pleasure that some should be destroyed, and because He fixed upon them as the unfortunate victims. While they thus destroy them.

selves, God may, if he choose, incline others to embrace the terms of salvation, and thus make a display of the riches of His grace. This right He asserts. *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.* But here the rebellious heart will suggest, If some are made willing to obey the Gospel, why not all? If those who are made willing, do not deserve the blessing bestowed upon them, what more can be said of those who are left to perish? Paul would say to such a caviller, “Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” And our Lord would say, “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight!” Such persons make their own ignorance the foundation of an argument against this part of the Divine procedure. They do not see the reason why some, after so much has been done for their salvation, are finally given up to take their own course to ruin, while others are saved; and therefore they conclude there is no reason! And this they think is sound logic! I do not see why the wicked were distinguished from the brute creation by the faculties of a rational soul, when God foreknew that they would thus pervert these faculties. But I take it for granted He has a sufficient reason for every thing He does, whether He thinks proper to reveal that reason to His creatures or not. This ought to put an end to all cavilling on the subject. On this ground, the mind ought to repose in entire satisfaction. One thing is perfectly clear—all deserve to be punished. If then *any* are saved it must be ascribed to sovereign mercy, and God must have a good reason for it; and it rests with Him

alone to determine who and how many. On this subject, no creature has any thing to say, or has a right to say any thing. If *one* be saved, it is an act of sovereign mercy. If one hundred or one thousand be saved, the mercy is so much the greater. But it has pleased God to reveal his design to save a multitude which no man can number. The accomplishment of this design will constitute the greatest wonder of the universe ; while each individual redeemed from the curse of the law, and from the power of sin, will be prepared to say, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us—but unto thy Name be all the glory !” Viewed in this light the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty must appear glorious to all holy beings. Christians who understand it thus, cannot but rejoice in it ; and one of their most delightful exercises is that of submission to this sovereignty. On this as well as on other accounts, we regret that some have associated this doctrine with other things with which it has no connection, and by which it is distorted and held up as an object of terror to those who have no other foundation for their hopes of eternal life. It stands connected in the minds of some with erroneous views respecting the atonement, and respecting the inability of sinners. No provision, they think, is made for the salvation of those who are lost, even on the supposition of their being willing to accept of it ; and they suppose there may be some really anxious to be saved, and willing to return to their duty if they could ! But, no—they can neither return to their duty, nor if they were to do so, could they be saved ! No atoning blood has been shed for them ; because the

sovereign will of God, without any reason for the distinction, has determined that they shall suffer in hell for ever, as the victims of his wrath; while in the same arbitrary manner He determines to save others, and makes them willing to accept the provision He has made for them! It is not surprising that those who have formed such an idea of Divine Sovereignty as this, should be shocked at it, and declare that there is no such doctrine contained in the Bible. Nor do we wonder that they feel prejudiced against those persons and those books which they think inculcate this doctrine. For the sake of those who labour under such impressions; and with the hope of setting this doctrine in a clear scriptural light, the present discussion has been undertaken. And the writer knows he expresses the views of the Presbyterian church, when he asserts that the Bible does not, as the above representation would make it, ascribe to God, a sovereignty of caprice, or of cruelty, or of injustice; that it does not claim for Him a right to do any thing merely because He has the power to do it, and is not responsible to any other being; nor the right of creating immortal beings if He choose, for the express purpose of destroying them, whether they deserve to be destroyed or not. On the contrary, it forbids to believe that any are made sinful and miserable, because they could not help it; merely because God would have it so. And it uniformly ascribes the destruction of sinners to themselves; to their voluntary, obstinate, and inexcusable wickedness, while it assures them that happiness is attainable by all, who, ceasing to do evil and learning to

do well, become the willing and obedient subjects of the Divine government. The sovereignty which the Bible ascribes to God is consistent with all his perfections. It results in fact, from the combination and the proper exercise of all his attributes. It is regulated by infinite wisdom, holiness, and beneficence. It does nothing but what wisdom, goodness, justice, and benevolence approves, and will approve for ever ; that is to say, it always does RIGHT ; always does that which every wise and holy being would *wish* to be done, if he could see all things in their true and proper light. Of course this implies that every thing which God does, and which we ascribe to His sovereignty because we cannot see the reasons why He does it, *is* nevertheless founded upon the best reasons. It would be utterly repugnant to every idea which the Bible gives us of the character of God, to suppose that He would do any thing without having a sufficient reason for it. When, therefore, He makes distinctions among his creatures, and especially when He bestows unmerited favours ; when He saves *some* of the *many* who deserve to perish, we ought to do Him the justice to take it for granted that He has a sufficient reason for what He does. And suppose He does not see fit to make known His reasons to us ; have we a right to demand, or even to expect such an explanation ? It were presumption to assert any such right. It would imply that we could not give our Maker credit for the wisdom and the rectitude of His proceedings any farther than we can *see* them to be wise and good. When man takes this ground he forgets that he is a worm, and what is lower still, a sinner !

What would be thought of one who should undertake to arraign the proceedings of our government, because he did not understand the constitution, or the principles upon which the government is conducted ; or because he could not see the reasons why certain things were done ? In many instances such persons would be unable to comprehend these reasons, and all attempts at explanation would be in vain. But the principles of political science, or the reasons which justify some of the most important measures of human governments are not so far above the comprehension of the most ignorant savage, as some parts of the Divine government are above the comprehension of the most exalted human intellect. Until, therefore, we can understand the whole theory of the Divine government as well as God himself understands it ; and extend our view through eternity, which constitutes the range of his administration, and see how the whole will be affected by every part, we must feel and acknowledge our utter incompetency to form an opinion with regard to those parts which He has not seen fit to reveal. But independently of these considerations *we* must be set aside as incompetent judges with regard to God's method of dealing with us, on the ground of our being parties deeply concerned. Our business is simply to investigate what He has revealed, and so far as we can ascertain what His word teaches on any subject, we are bound to yield an implicit acquiescence ; ever remembering that we are held responsible for all the errors which we may be led to adopt under the influence of wrong feeling.

As it is our wish to make the subject as plain as possible, we shall now present it in another light, with some additional illustrations. We invite the reader's attention, for a few moments, to a declaration of Scripture, which implies all we wish, at present, to maintain. It is found in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, ix. 18. *Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth.* What is mercy? It is favour to the ill-deserving. It always implies guilt, or desert of punishment, in those who are the objects of it. To say, then, that a man needs mercy, is to say that, on the grounds of strict justice, he deserves punishment. But all mankind, the entire race, without a single exception, need mercy. This will not be disputed by those with whom we are now arguing. They who deny the fact, must, to be consistent, set aside the whole system of Revelation; for it all goes upon the assumption that we are sinners; that this is the unvarying character of man in every age, and that, as such, we deserve to be condemned. But if all *deserve* punishment, God would have done right if He had inflicted it; *i. e.* if He had allowed the penalty of his law which we had incurred, to take its natural course, without resorting to any expedient to satisfy the demands of justice. But suppose that God, in his infinite wisdom and mercy, should devise a plan for satisfying the claims of justice, so that He could, consistently with these claims and with the honour of his government, make a sincere offer of pardon and salvation to those who will repent; and suppose that these sinners, in the exercise of their voluntary agency, should refuse to accept

the offer ; and suppose they are unanimous in this refusal ; not one is willing to repent and turn to God, or to accept of salvation on the conditions proposed ; suppose, moreover, that God has been at infinite expense in providing this salvation, and is not willing that the plan should prove abortive ; He sees that it will be best for the interests of the universe, that many of these sinners should be saved : it will not only make them eternally happy, but promote the happiness of all holy beings, and furnish a richer display of his own glory than any thing else could do ; and He delights in communicating happiness to his creatures so far as it can be done without detriment to his moral government. Suppose all this, and then let me ask, is not the way entirely open, for God to exert such an influence upon the minds of countless millions, or any number he may choose of our race, as shall incline them to embrace his offers of salvation ? Especially, considering that the alternative is, that He must either do this, or the whole race of man will perish, and the death of Christ will not issue in the salvation of one soul ! Now, this is supposing what the Bible states to be matter of fact. In one of our Lord's parables, in which he speaks of the provisions of the Gospel under the similitude of a marriage feast, the invitation is given—*Come, for all things are now ready.* The invitation is unlimited ; provision is made for all who will accept the invitation and come. But what was the conduct of those to whom the invitation was given ? *All with one consent began to make excuse : i. e.* all refused to come ! What then ? Must these rich and costly provisions be wasted and lost ? No ! that will not do.

Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in that my house may be filled : for I say unto you that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper. This parable is a happy illustration of our subject. Every one must see that those persons who thus refuse to come and partake of the provisions of the Gospel when thus invited, deserve to be lost ; but then it does not follow that those in the highways and hedges, who are constrained to come, deserve to be saved. They, too, at first begged to be excused ; and it is this fact which leads them to express their adoring wonder in such language as this :—

Why was I made to hear thy voice ?
 And enter while there's room ?
 When thousands make a wretched choice,
 And rather starve than come ?
 'Twas the same love that spread the feast
 That sweetly forced us in,
 Else we had still refused to taste
 And perished in our sin.

Here, again, we have the distinction between Divine Sovereignty and Divine Justice. It was sovereignty which said—*Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in that my house may be filled ;* and this explains the first clause of the text already cited : *I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy.* He has mercy upon these persons and saves them, because it is his sovereign pleasure so to do. SOVEREIGNTY, THEN, IS EXERCISED IN SAVING SINNERS, NOT IN DESTROYING THEM. They destroy *themselves*, when they violate the law and reject the Gospel. It is not Divine Sovereignty that

makes them do this, but their own voluntary and inexcusable wickedness, and it is not sovereignty, but *justice*, which passes the sentence of their exclusion—*I say unto you that none of these men who were bidden shall taste of my supper.* We say it was not sovereignty, but justice; because they *deserved* to be excluded; and if they deserved their punishment, there could have been no possible ground of complaint, if the process had gone no farther : *i. e.* if no others had been saved. But if others *are* saved, does their salvation change the character of the Divine procedure with regard to those who are *lost*? They deserve to perish as much as if no others were saved. The justice of their punishment remains the same, while all Heaven adores the sovereign mercy of God, in saying to his servants, Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in that my house may be filled.

But is it a fact that all sinners do refuse to embrace the offers of the Gospel? If they do not; if there are *any* who of their own accord repent, believe and obey, then my argument, so far as they are concerned, falls to the ground. But no matter what becomes of my argument, if it be not supported by the Law and the Testimony. Whether it be thus supported, let the reader judge, after weighing the following considerations :—

1. The passage of Scripture already commented on—All with one consent began to make excuse.

2. It is laid down as a characteristic of the wicked, that they *will not seek after God.* Rom. iii.

11. *There is none that seeketh after God.*

3. The doctrine of total depravity ascribes to men dispositions which are opposed to both the Law and the Gospel. *The carnal mind is enmity against God, it is not subject to his law, neither indeed can be. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was evil and only evil continually.* If this be the character of *man*, i. e. of the human species without exception, then, there is no room for the supposition that any, if left to themselves, would be disposed to repent and seek to be restored to the Divine favour.

4. The doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit and the necessity of His powerful operations in the conversion of sinners, proves that men, without this influence, would not embrace the offers of salvation. The belief of this truth is implied in every prayer that is offered up for the Holy Spirit to accompany the means employed for the salvation of sinners.

5. The experience of Christians corroborates all we have advanced on this subject. They know that such was their pride, rebellion, carnality, love of the world, entanglement in sin, and such the power of their depraved, and, in many instances, immoral habits, and such the influence exerted over them by wicked companions, that without the interposition of sovereign grace, they would never have seen the light of truth, nor yielded to its sanctifying influence ; and the conviction will remain with them forever, that they deserved to be consigned to destruction at the very moment when God began that work upon

their minds, which issued in their salvation. They feel, therefore, that his mercy to them is free, is undeserved, *i. e.* sovereign mercy ; that He had mercy upon them because he would have mercy. They believe He has a good reason for it, but that reason is unknown to them ; they know, however, that it is not found in themselves ; for every thing in them, if it operated as a reason, would demand their destruction. This sentiment is expressed in the song of the Redeemed, while they sing unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father—unto Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

The reader's attention is again called to that passage of scripture which is so intimately connected with this subject, and which has been more than once referred to in the preceding remarks. Therefore hath He mercy upon whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth. We may consider the former part of this text as explained, so far as an explanation is either possible or desirable in the present world : explained, at least, so far as is necessary for all practical and devotional purposes. Perhaps, however, it may be thought the concluding part of the sentence will not be so easily disposed of. But before we proceed any farther, let us pause to consider where we are, and with whom we have to do. Let us consider whose word we are investigating, and remember that His eye is upon us, and that our very thoughts are heard in Heaven. The subject has an awful aspect, and as it relates to the manner in which God will treat his

enemies, it behooves us to keep before our minds the scenes of the Judgment Day, and the retributions of Eternity.—*Whom He will He hardeneth.*

It is universally admitted that every writer and every speaker has a right to explain his own meaning of the terms which he may employ. It is but reasonable, therefore, that we allow the Bible to interpret itself. But where are we to look for an explanation of the meaning of these words? The Apostle directs us to the history of Pharaoh. It is too long to be here recited in detail. We shall select only those parts to which the Apostle particularly refers. These are found in Exd. ix. from v. 13 to the end. *And the Lord said unto Moses, rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh; and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God of the Hebrews; Let my people go, that they may serve me; for I will at this time send all my plagues upon thy heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth. And in very deed, for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power, that my Name may be declared throughout all the earth.* Then follows a description of a tremendous storm of rain, hail, thunder and lightning, so that *the fire ran along upon the ground.* This terrified the wicked king, and extorted from him the following language, addressed to Moses—*I have sinned this time. The Lord is righteous and I and my people are wicked. Entreat the Lord that there may be no more mighty thunderings and hail, and I will let you go. Moses entreated the Lord—and the thunders and hail and the rain ceased. And when Pharaoh saw that they were ceased, he sinned yet more and hardened his*

heart, he and his servants. And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened ; neither would he let the children of Israel go. On this passage we must beg leave to offer a criticism. Let it be observed that it occurs nearly at the close of the narrative which records the plagues of Egypt and the rebellion of Pharaoh. And let it be farther observed that the meaning of the word העמדת, in Hipil, which is rendered in our version, *I have raised thee up*, is, according to Gesenius—*I have upheld or preserved thee*. The first definition he gives of the root עמד is, to stand, stay. In Hipil it would be, I have caused thee to stand—or to continue. 2d definition, to stand firm—to abide. In Hipil—I have caused thee to stand firm, or to abide. 3d. to continue—also to continue to live. In Hipil, I have caused thee to continue ; I have caused thee to continue to live ; or which is the same thing, I have preserved thy life. Gesenius expressly observes that, in Hipil, it means, to cause to endure, to preserve. He says it also means, sometimes, to place or appoint to an office. In the 28th v. of this same chapter, our translators have rendered it *to stay or continue*—and in Hipil it would be, I have caused thee to stay or caused thee to continue, which is the same as *I have preserved thee*. The meaning then appears to be, that God, knowing the character of Pharaoh, as an obstinate, daring sinner, had, in His providence, placed him upon the throne or appointed him to the office of king, and moreover, had *preserved him alive* when he might justly have been cut off by some of the preceding plagues. It does not mean, as some understand our translation, that God had created Pharaoh for

the purpose of making him a hardened rebellious sinner as he was—and then to destroy him ; but that *being* a sinner of this character, God had placed him in that conspicuous station, and preserved him alive, through so many tremendous judgments, in order to make him a warning to others in every age. In order to set this subject in a still clearer light, let it be observed, that at the first introduction which the Bible gives us to the character of this man, we find him to be a sinner of no ordinary grade. *Who is the Lord*, said he, *that I should obey his voice ? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.* This is the language of bold defiance, and of most daring impiety. As a sinner, then, especially as a sinner of this high grade, he deserved to die ; God would have treated him justly if He had cut him off, and sent him to hell to be punished *there*. Certainly then He did him no injustice by preserving his life in order to begin his punishment in this world, and in order to make him the instrument of punishing a wicked nation who had concurred with him in oppressing the people of God.

This punishment was of two kinds ; 1st, the withdrawment of that restraining influence by which he had before been kept from doing all the evil which it was in his heart to do ; 2ndly, the plagues which were sent upon him and upon his kingdom ending in the destruction of himself and of his army in the Red Sea. As to the latter punishment, there appears to be no difficulty ; but with regard to the former, it is considered by many as involving a serious difficulty. *Whom He will He hardeneth.* The Apostle evidently

uses this expression with so direct a reference to Pharaoh, that the principles of fair interpretation will lead us to seek its elucidation in the history of that man. Of him it is sometimes said the Lord hardened his heart: but more frequently it is said that he hardened his own heart. Now, what is hardness of heart? It is moral insensibility—implying the absence of all those emotions and feelings which are found in the heart of one who fears and loves God, and the existence of the opposite state of feeling—of pride, obstinacy, enmity, rebellion—which inclines the sinner to any act of wickedness to which he may have a sufficient temptation. To harden the heart then, is to cherish pride, obstinacy, enmity, rebellion; and the question is, whether this was done by a direct agency of God, producing these feelings in the heart of Pharaoh, where they did not exist before? or whether that *restraining* influence which had prevented him from acting out the wickedness of his heart, was withdrawn? We think there can be no difficulty in deciding this question, if the following things be considered:—

1. Those dispositions which, according to the above explanation, are implied in hardness of heart, are natural to all unrenowned men. This cannot be denied without denying the doctrine of the total depravity of human nature. For Pharaoh, therefore, to cherish these dispositions, and yield to their influence, was just to act in character; to do what might be expected of a wicked man, if left to himself.

2. It is asserted of all impenitent men—for no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpre-

tation—that they do as much evil as they have it in their power to do. *Thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldst.* They act out as much of the wickedness of their hearts as God will let them. This truth is implied in God's declaration to Abimeleck, *I withheld thee from sinning against me.* To this restraining influence, we are to ascribe every thing that appears amiable in the character of unrenowned men; without it, society could not exist—the world would be turned upside down—it would become a field of blood—a range of devils, an emblem of hell itself.

3. God every where expresses his abhorrence of those dispositions which are implied in hardening the heart, and warns sinners against the indulgence of them. *To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.* He moreover tells them that if they do thus harden their hearts, they *shall be destroyed, and that without remedy.* Again, it is said, *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man.* But if He would not tempt a man to do evil, surely He would not, *by a direct agency upon his heart, cause him to indulge wicked dispositions, and then punish him for indulging them!* And, it would involve a still greater absurdity, if possible, to suppose that God created Pharaoh for the express purpose of making him a hardened rebellious sinner, and then, a monument of his wrath. This would, indeed, be a stretch of sovereignty, which might well fill the universe with consternation, for we should not know what to expect next; and we should have reason to indulge the most fearful forebodings. Not the most holy man on earth, nor the most ex-

alted angel in Heaven, could feel himself safe in the hands of such a Being. But, let the Heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice that the God of the Bible is not a Being of this description—but infinitely the reverse, His name is LOVE! His nature is LOVE, and it is the joy of the universe that no creature, under his eternal government, can get into a condition of sin and misery, without breaking through the most powerful moral restraints that Divine Beneficence can throw around him.

The supposition of a direct Divine agency upon the heart of Pharaoh to make him such a sinner as he was—or to cause him to exercise those dispositions which are implied in hardening his heart, is not only unsupported by scripture, but incompatible with every idea which the Scripture gives of the character of God. It is, moreover, unnecessary to resort to this supposition in order to account for the conduct of Pharaoh, since the fact is abundantly established both by Scripture and experience, that there is depravity enough in the hearts of men to account for any lengths of wickedness to which they may go, if that depravity is only suffered to take its natural course without restraint. When this is done, men harden their hearts, *i. e.* become more insensible to every right motive, and more outrageously wicked, as naturally as water hardens into ice when heat is removed.

The only remaining difficulty is, whether God might not justly withdraw from Pharaoh all restraints, and suffer him to act out the pride, the obstinacy, the enmity and rebellion of his heart? Why not? The soul that sinneth, shall die. Did

not Pharaoh deserve to die? Might he not justly have been cut off and consigned to hell long before? *There* all restraining influence would, of course, have been withdrawn; for it is withdrawn in all cases at death, and it is within the prerogative of Divine Sovereignty to determine *when* the sinner shall die. But if, for wise and beneficent reasons, God should determine, in any case to withdraw it before that period, He certainly has the most perfect right to do so. If it would be just to inflict the whole of that punishment which a sinner deserves to-day, it cannot be unjust to inflict a part, and suspend the remainder until to-morrow. The justice of God's procedure with Pharaoh, must be admitted, unless it could be shown that He was under some obligation to continue his restraining influence upon the heart of that wicked man. But if this could be shown, a principle would be established, which would be subversive of all moral government. On the same principle, God ought, by an exertion of physical power, to have prevented the sin of the devil and his angels, also the sin of our first parents, and all the sins of their posterity; He ought to stop the drunkard from destroying his body and his soul; and to paralyze the tongue of the profane swearer, to prevent him from uttering his blasphemies; and cause the weapon of the assassin to drop from his hands; in short, to prevent all the wickedness that is perpetrated on earth and in hell, even when the hearts of men and devils are *set* in them to do evil. We say this would be subversive of all moral government, because it would destroy the free agency of creatures.

The last remark which it seems necessary to make on this subject, is, that the interpretation we have advanced makes the Scriptures consistent with themselves. In several instances it is said Pharaoh hardened his own heart. But if God hardened his heart by a direct agency, it does not appear how he could harden his own heart, in any sense which would imply his criminality. On the other hand, to say that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, is entirely consistent with the supposition that God withdrew from him all restraining influence, and gave him up to do that evil which his heart was inclined to do. This interpretation would make the two declarations perfectly consistent; and the justice of the procedure cannot be denied, without denying that God has a right to execute the sentence of death upon the sinner. If he deserve to die, then, every moment he lives is an exercise of God's forbearance. It is sovereign mercy that keeps him alive and out of hell. The same may be said respecting the continuance of restraining grace. It is as unmerited as the continuance of a life that has been forfeited by sin. Suppose then, that Pharaoh had, as we now express it, passed his day of grace before Moses was sent to him, and was at that time given up as an incorrigible rebel—of course God might *then* have justly cut him off. But suppose, for wise and important reasons, He determined to spare the life of this man a little longer; to preserve him when he is under sentence of death; and to elevate him to the throne of Egypt, in order to make the example of his punishment the more conspicuous and the more salutary to all succeeding ages; who can

question the propriety of the procedure? And now for the conclusion. If we have given the true explanation of the manner in which Pharaoh's heart was hardened, it must determine the meaning of the latter clause of that much-controverted text on which we have been commenting, since it is the conclusion which the Apostle draws, from the language of God to Pharaoh. *For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh; Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up that I might show my power in thee, and that my Name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth.* In saying that the explanation of the manner in which Pharaoh's heart was hardened, must determine the meaning of this text, we wish to be understood as asserting that all others who are hardened, are hardened in the same manner, with due allowance for the difference of circumstances. If this be not the true inference, then it does not appear why the Apostle should have referred to the case of Pharaoh as illustrative of the truth he was maintaining; and it would be impossible to find out a logical connection between the fact which the Scripture had asserted of Pharaoh, and the conclusion which the Apostle draws from it; *THEREFORE hath He mercy, &c.* Our view of this subject is corroborated by other parts of Scripture which speak of the same mode of treatment. *My spirit shall not always strive with man. Wo! to them when I depart from them! O that thou hadst known, at least in this thy day the things which be-long unto thy peace, BUT NOW ARE THEY HID FROM THINE EYES, &c. &c.* We should fail to give a

fair view of this subject, if we were not to remark that, in most cases of this nature, mentioned in the Bible, this hardening took place, after many means had been employed in vain, to reclaim the persons who were thus abandoned. The instances in which the narrative distinctly informs us that this was the fact, are sufficiently numerous to establish the principle, that this is the mode of the Divine procedure ; and, as this fact is not contradicted by any thing which occurs in the Bible relative to this subject ; and as it accords with the experience of those who, at the present day, appear to be finally given up to hardness of heart, we need not hesitate to admit it. Indeed, it appears from the ordinary course of Providence, as well as from Scripture, that it is a part of God's plan with regard to those who will not be reclaimed, to withdraw his restraining grace, to allow their sins to multiply, and to make their wicked dispositions and the natural consequences of their crimes, instrumental in their own punishment.

Since writing the above, I have consulted Schleusner, on the word *σκληρύνω*, and find that he gives, substantially, the same interpretation as I have given. He suggests one idea, however, which I had not seen suggested before ; that the word *σκληρύνω* and its derivatives, express *punishment*, or that mode of treatment which is dictated by pure justice, in opposition to the exercise of mercy. This throws light upon the subject, and corroborates our argument. The text we have been explaining, will, then, be illustrated by another found in the xi. chap. of the same Epistle. *Behold, therefore, the goodness and se-*

verity of God ! On them which fell, severity ; but on thee, goodness, &c. The severity here spoken of, is the *severity of justice*, in the punishment of obstinate and incorrigible sinners.—The contrast appears to be the same in both texts. Therefore, hath He mercy on whom He will—and whom He will He hardeneth ; *i. e.* He deals in sovereign mercy with some ; overcomes the opposition of their hearts, and makes them willing in the day of His power ; while, after making provision for the salvation of others, and offering it to them sincerely, and urging them to accept of it by the most powerful motives, accompanied by the striving of his spirit ; and all in vain,—He finally determines to use these means no longer. He says, *My Spirit shall not always strive with man*, and He ceases to strive with them, departs from them, withdraws his restraining grace, and gives them up to the wicked dispositions of their own hearts, and to the power of the devil. In all such cases, He sees those circumstances which, although they may not be distinguishable by us, from the circumstances which attend the rebellion of those whom He subdues and saves, yet, render it wise and expedient and necessary that these persons should experience the tremendous inflictions of justice. This mode of treatment may be implied in the word *σκληρυνει*, and for examples of a similar meaning of the word, see Septuagint, 1 Sam. v. 7. 2 Sam. xix. 43. 2 Chron. x. 4. Job xxxix. 16.

PART II.

The Connection of Divine Sovereignty with Man's Responsibility.

WE have now established the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty, and shown how it is illustrated in the salvation of sinners. It is on this principle alone that mercy is exercised. The atonement of Christ does not remove the ill-desert of sinners, not even of those who are saved. It only reconciles the apparently conflicting attributes of mercy and justice, so as to render the exercise of mercy, in all cases in which God shall see fit to exercise it, consistent with justice. If then the salvation of God's people be entirely of grace, unmerited by them in any sense or in any degree; if He has in fact accomplished the work, and claims a tribute of eternal gratitude and praise from those who have been thus distinguished; the question arises, How is this great work accomplished? Has man any thing to do in the case? Or is he required just to wait until the time comes when sovereign grace shall accomplish the change without his own efforts? Is there any DUTY required of him in reference to this change, for which he is held responsible, so that if he fail to obtain salvation, the blame may rest upon himself and not upon God? If this question be answered in the affirmative; if duty is required of the sinner, which, if performed, would secure his salvation, how is this fact con-

sistent with the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty, as already explained? Or how is it consistent with the fact that all who are saved, owe their salvation to sovereign grace? Some, from a dread of antinomian errors, exclude the idea of Divine Sovereignty as having any thing to do in the case, and make the salvation of the sinner to turn entirely upon his own will, without any special influence of the Holy Spirit to give that will the right direction. But on this plan, if the principles maintained in the former part, be correct, none would be saved. Besides, it takes for granted a number of things which are not true: 1. That all with one consent *do not* pray to be excused; that *some are* willing to accept the invitations of the Gospel. 2. That the hearts of the sons of men are *not* set in them to do evil; that they have *some* good thoughts and imaginations. 3. That the carnal mind is not, at least in *all* cases, *enmity* against God. 4. That there are *some* of the wicked, who do, of their own accord *seek after God*, &c. &c. All this is so directly opposed to the Bible, that before we can admit it, we must set the Bible aside as a Divine Revelation.

Others, by a process of reasoning which would not satisfy them on any subject of importance connected with their temporal interests, come to the conclusion that man has nothing to do in the work of his own salvation, and accordingly they do nothing. They reason thus: "Salvation is the work of God. If He has determined to save *me*, He will in his own good time accomplish it; I cannot hasten it, and I have nothing to do with it. Here I will rest the matter, and live in hope." Meanwhile they are employing their active powers both of body and of mind, in rebelling against

God, and in working out their own destruction, with a fixedness of purpose, and with a degree of energy and perseverance, which, if employed agreeably to the directions of the Bible in securing their salvation, would never fail to attain that object.

They appear not to consider that this mode of reasoning if applied to other things as they apply it to religion, would put a stop to all human labours and pursuits. But an argument which proves so much, of course proves nothing. It refutes itself by the absurdities to which it leads. They err, too, fundamentally, in not stopping to inquire whether God has revealed his will with regard to this matter? Whether He has made known the *method* by which He proposes to accomplish this work? And if so, whether He has released *them* from all responsibility in the case, so that they can, without guilt or danger, go on in the constant violation of his laws, and in the total neglect of the Gospel? These questions ought to be settled: and it will be our object in the remaining part of this discussion to assist the honest inquirer in making up his mind with regard to them.

That principle which guided Sir Isaac Newton in his philosophical researches, and by adhering to which, others have made all those discoveries both in physical and moral science which are really valuable, ought to regulate all our theological inquiries. The principle is this: To discard all theories, and mere conjectures, and unintelligible terms, and to attend simply to matters of *fact*. This principle is just as important to the correct understanding of the Volume of Revela-

tion, as of the volume of nature. Let us see how it will operate when applied to the investigation of our present subject.

1. It is a matter of fact, as already ascertained, that no sinner is saved except by the sovereign mercy and grace of God.

2. It is also a fact that man possesses the powers of a free moral agent.—But before we proceed to argue from this second fact, it may, in the view of some, require both proof and illustration. We have both to give.

None will deny that man in his original state, possessed the powers of a free moral agent. But the question is whether he possess them in his present fallen condition? If any such change have taken place we may surely expect to be distinctly informed of it in the Bible, and we may expect to see man dealt with accordingly. But what is the fact? No intimation is given in the Bible of such a change. On the contrary the whole of its contents go upon the assumption that man still possesses the powers in question. So universally is this the fact, that if it could be shown that man does not possess these powers, the Bible would become the most unintelligible book in the world. Its doctrines, precepts, exhortations, warnings, expostulations, &c. are addressed—to whom? To those who are incapable of feeling the force of motives? To those who are unable to distinguish between right and wrong? To those who have no ability to perform any duty? So it seems, if man does not now possess the powers of a free moral agent. And then, who can vindicate either the wisdom or the goodness of Him who claims to be the

Author of the Bible. We have made some reference to the *motives* which are addressed to men in the Bible. These are a sufficient proof that God still regards us as being proper subjects of his moral government, since it is in this manner alone that moral government can be exercised. But it were absurd to maintain that man is a subject of this kind of government without possessing the powers, which it necessarily implies. Without such powers, he would be no more accountable for his conduct than idiots or brutes are accountable for theirs. The doctrine of man's accountability therefore, implies that he is capable of doing both good and evil, and that if he does evil, it is because he *chooses* to do it, and not because he was unable to do good. And this doctrine which is so clearly taught in the Bible, has in its favour all the evidence of our own consciousness. It is written upon the heart of man by the finger of God ; and man, depraved as he is, cannot expunge the record without destroying his own rationality. In all his dark and guilty wanderings, there is still an impression, more or less distinct, resting upon his mind, and often disturbing his repose, that he is accountable to the Being who made, and who sustains him ; yes, and he dreads the doom which he feels he deserves for the abuse and perversion of his faculties. He sometimes feels a mountain of guilt pressing upon his soul ; and while conscience passes her verdict against him, he anticipates with fear and trembling, the more terrible sentence of a higher tribunal.

Let us present this argument in another light. If man possess this character of moral respon-

sibility, and consequently the powers which that character implies, it follows that all his *actions* are *free*. The moment they cease to be free, *i. e.* to be the result of choice, he ceases to be accountable. When, therefore, he transgresses the Divine law, he does it voluntarily, *i. e.* because he chooses to do so, when he might have done otherwise if he had been disposed. And this is true in reference to every individual sin both against the law and against the Gospel; he is not compelled to commit one of them. But if he acts freely in transgressing the law, he might act freely in obeying it. If he acts freely in rejecting the Gospel, he might act freely in receiving it. Obedience in both cases requires no other powers than those which he so freely employs in a course of disobedience. He who is able to hate God is able to love Him. He who is able to rebel against God, is able to submit to Him and obey Him. Moreover, he who is able to reject the Gospel, is able to receive it. The same faculties are exercised in both cases. The only difference is in the disposition. This appears with still clearer evidence from the fact that the sinner is continually exercising, with regard to other things, the same faculties which obedience to the Gospel demands. This obedience is comprised in repentance and faith. He who can be sorry for one thing, can be sorry for another thing, provided it be the proper object of sorrow; and sincere sorrow for sin is repentance. Again, he who can exercise faith in one object, can exercise it in another object, provided the testimony be worthy of credit. But man can believe his fellow man, he can believe the lies of

Satan ; he is doing both continually, and yet, he alleges, he cannot believe the truth of God ! He can trust in his fellow creatures, but he cannot trust in God his Redeemer ! This is opposed to common sense, as well as to Scripture. Common sense will decide that if a man can carry 100 pounds of lead, he can carry 100 pounds of iron, or 100 pounds of any thing else. Common sense will say that if we can believe one being who may deceive us, we can believe another who cannot deceive us. But after all, the difficulty is not so much in believing simply, as in the practical consequences which must grow out of it : from these consequences the sinner recoils, and to quiet his conscience he says he cannot believe ; and they who ease off his obligations in any way, are accessory to his delusion, and if he is lost, to his destruction. The strong disposition which the sinner has to do wrong, does not destroy or impair the freedom of his agency, any more than if he were disposed to do right. The disposition to do wrong does not destroy any faculty which he possessed before, and while this continues to be true, he retains the character of a free and responsible agent, and that in as high a degree as if he were disposed to make the best use of his faculties.

The views of some of the Reformers on this subject, were not clear, and their writings, so far as this point is concerned, have not contributed much to the reformation of the church, or to the conversion of the world. They often spoke of the bondage of the human will in such terms, as led to the conclusion that man is free only to commit sin, not to do his duty. But this is absurd.

If he is not free to do his duty, so that nothing prevents him from doing it but the want of a willing mind, he has not the freedom which is essential to moral responsibility, and of course he could not commit sin, any more than he could perform religious duty.

In order to set this subject in as clear a light as possible, we shall now cite a few passages of Scripture which support all that has been advanced with regard to our second fact. Moses said to the Israelites, *See I have set before thee life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore CHOOSE life.* &c. By the prophet Isaiah God says, *Come now—let us reason together—though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be like wool—IF YE BE WILLING AND OBEDIENT. But if ye REFUSE AND REBEL ye shall be devoured with the sword, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.* Again, He says, *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, &c.* Jeremiah says, *Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the Lord which I speak unto thee, so it shall be well with thee, and thy soul shall live. But if thou REFUSE, &c.* Ezekiel says, *Cast away from you all your transgressions whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit, for why will ye die? Our Lord came not to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfil both.* His mission; his whole mediatorial work, proceeds upon the assumption that men deserve to perish for their sins against the law. And while He redeems them from its curse, He calls them to repent and to return to obedience. *Except ye repent, says He, ye shall*

all likewise perish. With regard to those who do not obey the Gospel, He says, *This is the condemnation that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. Ye will not come to me that ye might have life.* And when He says, *No man can come to me except the Father draw him,* he uses the word *cannot* in the same sense in which it is used when it is said, *Joseph's brethren hated him so much that they could not speak peaceably to him.* Another example of this use of the word we have in 1 John iii. 9. *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin because he is born of God.* It is indeed a common form of expression, of which we hear examples every day; and it is perfectly well understood, as meaning a great unwillingness or aversion. When such unwillingness or aversion is felt by a child or a servant, with regard to an acknowledged duty, it is never considered as releasing the party from obligation; or as in any degree affecting his accountability. Neither willingness nor unwillingness has any thing to do with accountability. Questions of duty do not depend upon either of these states of mind. The unwillingness of Joseph's brethren to speak peaceably to him, arising from their envy and hatred, was no more inconsistent with their free agency and moral responsibility in the case, than the unwillingness of a child of God to sin is inconsistent with his. If a man under the influence of good dispositions becomes so confirmed in habits of well doing, that it may be said with truth, in the common acceptation of the phrase, he cannot do wrong; so a man under

the influence of depraved dispositions, may become so fixed in habits of evil doing, that it may be said with equal truth, and in the same sense, he cannot do right ; and if this *cannot* does not destroy free agency and responsibility in the one case neither does it in the other.

The sum of all we have advanced on this point is, that the apostacy of man has produced no change with regard to the freedom of his agency : that it has neither destroyed nor lessened one of his obligations ; that he still possesses the faculties requisite to the performance of all the duties which God demands of him ; and that however unwilling he may be to perform these duties, they may be justly required of him ; that on this ground the Scriptures *do* require these duties, while they represent the sinner, as guilty and deserving the punishment of hell, for the neglect of them, and for the violation of his many obligations—while not a single hint is given of his labouring under any sort of inability which would furnish the least excuse for his wicked conduct ; nor is the necessity of Divine agency for his conversion ever spoken of as releasing him from any duty which is implied in that change or from any obligation whatever.

And now let us consider what progress we have made in this investigation. We have ascertained at least two important facts. The first is, that all who are saved, owe their salvation to the sovereign mercy and grace of God ; the second is, that man possesses all the faculties requisite to free agency and moral responsibility, and that, to the full extent of all the requirements both of the Law and of the Gospel. Let us still

keep in view the sound philosophical principle. We are searching for facts, not in the material world, but in the Revelation of God. The next fact which we wish to ascertain, is, whether in producing the great change in the character of those whom He saves, God has revealed it as his plan, to suspend the exercise of their moral agency, and give them to understand that they have nothing to do in this work, and that no responsibility rests upon them with regard to it; or whether this change is effected by exciting them to feel their responsibility, and to act in accordance with it? To the law and to the testimony. David says, *I thought on my ways and turned my feet to thy testimonies. Thus saith the Lord, consider your ways. Choose ye this day whom you will serve. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear; acquaint thyself with Him and be at peace. Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see and ask for the old paths, where is the good way and walk therein, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Consider how great things He hath done for thee. The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance. The Law is our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ. How? By convincing of sin, and denouncing its curse upon all who are out of Christ. But this implies a sense of obligation to perform the duties which the Law enjoins, otherwise there could be no conviction of guilt or just apprehension of danger.—Repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will ye die? Be ye reconciled to God. Submit yourselves to God.*

Repent ye and believe the Gospel. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be damned. Again, Christians are spoken of as those who have *fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them.* The allusion here is to the efforts made by those who were fleeing from *the avenger of blood*, to the *cities of refuge*. It is therefore affirmed of Christians, that in order to become such, they had to exert all their energies, and to feel that it was nothing less than a struggle for life. And this is the meaning of our Lord's direction—*strive*—*Ἀγωνίζεσθε*—*to enter through the straight gate.* The same truth is implied in the nature of the INSTRUMENT employed in conversion. *Being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible; by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. Of his own will, begat He us with the word of truth.* However well Divine truth may be adapted to answer the end for which it is given, it could produce no effect, even instrumentally, without being understood. Here then is an occasion for exerting the powers of the understanding; a necessity for the application of the mind to the subject. And when understood, these truths produce no saving effect, without being cordially received and reduced to practice. All this accords with the experience of Christians. It is a fact that none are saved without being operated upon in this way. All are brought to think, to consider, to hear with attention; to inquire for the good way; and when they find it to walk therein; to choose whom they will serve; to repent, to submit to God, to believe in Christ; to flee to Him as to the city of refuge; to agonize in

order to enter through the straight gate, and finally, to bring their minds, and hearts, and consciences fairly into contact with Divine truth, to receive it cordially, and to yield to its practical and sanctifying influence. If then we are willing to be guided by facts found in Scripture, and supported by universal experience, we must come to the conclusion, that in saving His people from their sins, God does not suspend the exercise of their moral agency, nor release them from their obligation to do every thing which is implied in the great change ; but on the contrary leads them to feel this obligation, and to act in accordance with it : that is to say, He operates upon man in a way adapted to his rational and accountable nature.

Here it may be proper to notice a difficulty. Some not entering fully into the views above expressed, will be ready to meet us with such language as this : “It is true, I am, in a sense, under obligation to obey both the Law and the Gospel, and I am in a sinful condition ; but how can I get out of it ? You state it as a fact, that all who are saved are led by sovereign grace, to seek salvation. By this I understand that they have what some term a call of the Holy Spirit. Now, this call I have not received, and it is not worth my while to attempt any thing in religion until I have it ; *i. e.* until the Holy Spirit begin the work ; and then”————

But again we say—To the Law and to the Testimony. What is the Scripture fact in the case ? How does God call sinners to seek salvation ? *To you O men I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. How long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity ; and the scorers delight in their scorning.*

and fools hate knowledge. Turn you at my reproof. Behold I will pour out my spirit unto you : I will make known my words unto you. Repent ye and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. Men and Brethren : children of the stock of Israel and WHOSOEVER among you feareth God, TO YOU is the word of this salvation sent. Come, for all things are now ready. The Spirit and the Bride say come, and let him that heareth say come ; and whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely ! Here is the REVEALED FACT with regard to this point. This is the call of God to every sinner who reads or hears the Gospel, and they who neglect it, have no reason to expect another call of the Spirit. The Spirit accompanies the word, and in hearing and obeying the word, there is an express promise of the Spirit. It is farther to be considered that *all Scripture is given by inspiration of God*, and that those *holy men* who wrote the Bible *spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*. The Bible, then, contains the very words which the Holy Spirit would use, if He were to address sinners in any other way. Every command, therefore, to repent, to believe in Christ, to be reconciled to God, &c. is a call of the Holy Spirit. When we read or hear these calls, our IMMEDIATE DUTY IS TO OBEY, and not to wait until we can feel the Holy Spirit operating upon us in some other way ; or until we can settle all the difficult questions connected with the Doctrine of Divine Sovereignty. This is not the time to settle such questions ; God does not require us to settle them, nor to spend a thought about them, at such a time. He

calls us not to *speculate*, but to *act* ; not to *cavil*, but to *submit* ; and the fact in this case, as all scripture and experience demonstrate, is, that THOSE WHO OBEY THIS CALL ARE SAVED, WHILE ALL OTHERS PERISH. And when sinners do thus perish, the truth respecting them is, not that Divine Sovereignty excluded them from salvation, but that they excluded themselves ; not that the Holy Spirit withheld his calls from them while He was calling others ; but that when He called, they refused to hear ; that when He had shed the light of truth around them, they had loved darkness rather than light ; and that when He strove with them, they had resisted, and willingly surrendered themselves to the power of *another* Spirit, whose calls and influences were more congenial with the dispositions of their hearts. *Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost. Who are led captive by the devil at his will. The Spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.*

The objection we are now considering, supposes that it is useless to make any efforts to obtain salvation, since no sinner is saved except by the sovereign grace of God ; and since, as the sinner alleges, it is doubtful whether the *present* is the time when God is willing to impart that grace. But in coming to this conclusion, the objector loses sight of the true philosophical principle. He forgets or overlooks the plain matter of fact, as it stands revealed in the Bible, and follows the light, or rather, the darkness of his own wayward speculations. What does the Bible state to be indispensable to the salvation of a sinner ? The answer is—Repentance towards God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Who is to

repent? and who is to believe? Of course, the sinner himself. But are repentance and faith required of him *as duties*? As clearly as if the doctrine of sovereign grace, had no place in the Bible. God now commands all men every where to repent; and this is his command—that we should believe on his Son Jesus Christ. Now, can any man in his senses believe, that God intended any thing which He has said respecting his own sovereign operations, to be so construed as to nullify these positive commands? And if they are the commands of God, why were they given, if they are not to be obeyed? Have they grown obsolete? Are they to be buried in oblivion like many parts of our civil code, which, by common consent, are suffered to remain a dead letter—as inoperative as if they had no place in the statute book? The laws of God are not to be thus trifled with—but at our peril. When, therefore, he commands us to repent and obey the Gospel, we are to acknowledge our obligation to perform these duties; not conditionally; not at a future period, but now—immediately; that delay in this case, is rebellion against Divine Authority, even though the pretext should be, that we are waiting to be saved by Sovereign Grace. We ought to know that Sovereign Grace was never intended to supersede Divine Authority, nor to cancel our obligations; and that if we make this use of it, we are departing from God's revealed plan of salvation, and perverting a doctrine which lays the only foundation of a sinner's hope, to the purpose of licentiousness. Still more light will be thrown upon this subject by considering THE REASON WHY I, AS A SINNER, AM

BOUND TO REPENT. What creates the moral obligation in the case? Is it any thing that is said in the Bible respecting the operations of the Holy Spirit? Or is it the fact, supposing it to be true, that the Holy Spirit is now operating upon my mind? This cannot be admitted, unless it could be shown by better evidence than Dr. J's assertion, that "man's natural faculties are not commensurate with the Divine requirements"—that God does actually require of the sinner more than he is able to perform, supposing him to be willing. If this were true, then, of course, our obligation to repent, to love God, &c. would cease; for real, physical inability, always was, and always will be, a valid excuse; and labouring under such inability, we could not do otherwise than wait for the sovereign operations of Divine Grace; and there would be no sin in waiting. But is this the Scripture fact? The Bible asserts my obligation to repent; and for the non-performance of this duty, it admits no excuse of any kind. My obligation to repent, therefore, is not suspended upon any thing that is said respecting the operation of the Holy Spirit. He may, or He may not, be operating upon me, but my obligation to repent does not depend upon the decision of that question, and it cannot be affected by the decision of that question one way nor another. The obligation is founded upon the evil I have done, the sin I have committed in rebelling against God; and upon the fact that I possess all the faculties requisite to the performance of this duty. If I have rebelled against God I have done infinitely wrong; and if I can be sorry for *any* thing, I ought to be sorry for *this thing*, and to do so no

more ; and this is the very definition of repentance.

Again. *Why* am I bound to exercise faith in Christ, or to believe the Gospel ? On what is the obligation founded ? Not on the fact, if it be true, that the Holy Spirit is now operating upon my mind. This may, or it may not, be true ; but my obligation to believe is not suspended upon the decision of that question. It exists independently of any promise of the Holy Spirit, and would have existed if no such promise had ever been given ; *i. e.* if nothing had been said respecting the doctrine of sovereign grace in the Bible. I am bound to believe, because, having rebelled against God and become alienated from Him by wicked works, I ought to be willing to be reconciled to Him on his own terms. He has revealed these terms in the Gospel, and, therefore, as soon as the Gospel is made known to me, I ought to embrace it. To delay, is to rebel, although the pretext be that I am waiting for sovereign grace to give me faith ; or that I am trying to ascertain whether the Holy Spirit is really operating upon me ? I ought to know that the doctrine of Sovereign Grace was never intended to supersede Divine authority ; and that whatever may be said in the Bible respecting the agency of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of sinners, it was never intended to release them from any duty which is implied in their conversion, and certainly it was not intended to cancel or to lessen my obligation to obey the positive command of God to believe in his Son. And besides, to delay the performance of this duty for the purpose of ascertaining whether the Holy Spirit be really

operating upon my mind, is both useless and absurd. At this stage of experience the question cannot be determined. The Agent is invisible ; and when He does operate, His influences are so entirely coincident with the laws by which the human mind is accustomed to be governed, that they cannot be distinguished, except by their *effects*. When these are holy, *i. e.* when the sinner becomes willing to renounce his sins, to embrace the Gospel and to obey its precepts, this change demonstrates the operation of the Holy Spirit ; since it is uniformly ascribed to His agency in the Bible. But until this change takes place, there is no possibility of ascertaining that the Holy Spirit is at work. It is clear, therefore, even to demonstration, that if we wait until this point is ascertained before we admit our obligations to repent and to believe, and put forth our faculties in earnest for this purpose, we cannot be saved at all according to the plan which God has revealed.

Moreover, it is to be considered that, while the sinner is puzzling his mind about these previous questions, it is turned off from the pressing commands of the Gospel. God requires him to do *something* in order that he may be saved. What is it ? Let him not lose sight of *that* ; let not his attention be divided by any other considerations whatever. It must be concentrated to this point in order to his conversion. This was the plan pursued by the Apostles in dealing with awakened sinners ; and while they pressed the simple obligation to repent and believe the Gospel, the Holy Spirit operated powerfully and savingly, and when the work was done, the Apostles and their

converts ascribed all the glory to the sovereign grace of God.

But there is no end to cavilling, if the heart be so disposed. The question may still be asked, If conversion be the work of God, why may He not accomplish it at once, without requiring the sinner to do those things which are implied in conversion, and which it is morally certain he never will do, unless he be made willing by the sovereign grace of God. The question is presumptuous: nevertheless, it admits of a satisfactory answer. In the first place, we say, God is under no obligation to save *one* of all the sinners in the universe. In every instance in which He saves a sinner, He manifests unparalleled grace and condescension. Certainly, therefore, there is no room left for us to complain of *any* method which He may think proper to adopt. But our answer does not stop here. We go farther, and affirm that God's plan is the *best* that could have been adopted. We believe this, not only because it is *His* plan, and therefore *must* be the result of infinite wisdom and goodness, but because we *see* it to be so. If, according to our 2d fact, man has lost none of those powers which are implied in free agency; if his obligations to God have not been lessened by the fall; if he still have the faculties requisite to the performance of his duty, so that nothing is wanting but the right disposition; then, with what propriety could he be released from the obligation to perform any duty required in the Law or in the Gospel? To release him from such obligations would be to give up the whole point in controversy—it would, in fact, make void both the Law and the Gospel:

and it would concede this most absurd principle : that when a creature becomes depraved, *i. e.* becomes wicked enough to hate God, and to rebel against His government, he is then, ipso facto, released from all obligation to love God and to obey Him ! He may then live in sin to eternity, and it will be no sin to him ! Until, therefore, God is willing thus to deny himself ; to give up his law and to surrender all his claims upon his intelligent creatures, He must still assert his rights, however unwilling the wicked may be to acknowledge them. He must demand from us that love, submission, and obedience which are due to Him from creatures placed in our circumstances, and possessing the faculties of free, intelligent, moral agents. And this He must do, although it may be absolutely certain, that not one would ever submit to his authority and obey his commands. In this case they are in his hands to do with them as he may please. If He determine to punish them, they deserve it. If He choose to exercise sovereign mercy towards them, and can do it consistently with justice, so let it be ! and let Him take that method which may appear best to himself for bringing about that change in their character which shall fit them for the high destiny of his children. He *has* adopted a method, approved by infinite wisdom, and suited to the nature of man. That method He has revealed, and because it has been so often and so fatally mistaken, we have endeavored by an induction of Scripture facts, to show what it is, and to set it in the clearest light. In this light we see that it is not God's revealed plan to operate upon man as if he were an automaton, a mere machine, or

a mass of unintelligent matter ; but to deal with him from first to last, as a rational, accountable being, a free agent, and therefore a proper subject of his moral government. We see that He does not suspend, for a moment, the exercise of man's faculties ; but excites these faculties by motives which operate thus upon his reason, his conscience, and his heart. Thus He leads on the sinner, under a full conviction of his obligation at every step, and while he proceeds, he acts as freely, and as much upon the principles of moral agency, as if no Divine influence were employed in the case. The truths of the Bible, are, indeed, now presented to his mind in a light in which he never saw them before, and he feels them as he never felt them before. But whether he regard this change in his views and feelings, as the *result* of Divine influence or not, he knows that they are the views and feelings which he ought always to have had, because they are according to truth—and that the reason why he did not possess them before, was, that he *loved darkness rather than light*. Thus is he led, under the same Divine influence, to such a conviction of his guilt as issues in true repentance. Whereas, if he had not admitted his obligation to perform all that duty which the Gospel requires, and which is actually performed in becoming a Christian, this result could not have taken place. The reason is plain. No man will become a Christian without such convictions of his guilt as will prepare him to make the distinct and heart-felt acknowledgment, that he deserves to be condemned. But a conviction of guilt arises only from a view of *violated obligations*. The sinner

must, therefore, admit the *existence* of these obligations, or he would never feel that he deserved to be condemned. Condemned ! for what ? For not seeing without eyes ! For not performing duties which he was physically as unable to perform, as he would be to drain the ocean, or climb to the moon ! No ! he could never feel guilty for not doing such things. But still he feels guilty ; and why ? because he sees and feels that he has all along, even in this most careless and wicked part of his life, since the means of information have been within his reach, been under the highest obligation to know the truth and to embrace it ; to love God and to obey Him ; to repent of his sins and to seek salvation through the merits of Christ. This, after all the wrong notions he has entertained, and after all his cavilling, he is constrained to admit. And while he admits it, keen convictions seize upon his conscience ; his heart dies within him ; he sinks under a mountain of guilt, and cries, Lord save, I perish ! And now SOVEREIGN GRACE reigns and triumphs ; he is cut off from every other hope ; to this he flees for refuge. The plan appears infinitely glorious ; himself a miracle of mercy, and God his Redeemer, worthy to receive all blessing and praise and honour and glory forever.

And now, beloved reader, where are we ? We have navigated a dark and dangerous sea ; dark, because men have smothered the lights which Heaven had provided for their direction, in consequence of which, many have made shipwreck, by sailing too far either to the right or to the left. On the one hand is Scylla, on the other is Charyb-

dis ; around both of which are many floating memorials of the folly and wickedness of those who have put out the lights of Heaven, or which is the same thing, paid no regard to them. Looking at these memorials, we were admonished to make it our first care to remove, so far as we could, every thing which might obscure these lights, and we have never lost sight of them through the whole passage. By their kindly aid we have found the *medium iter*, and are now safely landed. To drop the figure : we have sought, and if we mistake not, found the middle way between Antinomianism and Arminianism, two great systems which combine much truth, with much plausible and dangerous error ; systems, which although so hostile, have contributed to perpetuate each other by driving men to opposite extremes. To such extremes our fallen nature is ever inclined. Aware of this, we have tried to guard against its tendency by looking to Him from whom all grace and wisdom proceed, and whose truth we regard as infinitely more valuable than all the gold of Opher. We have long had the conviction that this truth, so far as the present inquiry is concerned, lies somewhere between the above named systems, and that the only way to come at it, was to lay aside, as far as possible, all Antinomian and Arminian antipathies ; to forget or disregard what has been said and written by men on both sides of the question, and to bring the principles of sound philosophy, which are in fact the true principles of sacred exegesis, to bear upon this investigation. This we have attempted, and it is hoped not without success.

And now to the **PATRONAGE** of the **LORD JESUS CHRIST**, we commend our little volume, imploring His blessing upon it, so far as it may be adapted to promote the cause of **TRUTH** and **RIGHTEOUSNESS**! **AMEN.**





